

BETTER HEALTH *stories*

HEALTHY
NORTH COAST

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NORTH COAST
An Australian Government Initiative

Spring 2025



“I’m delighted to welcome you to the spring 2025 edition of Better Health Stories. This season’s stories shine a light on what makes our region strong - the dedication of our health professionals, the innovation of our services, the resilience of our communities, and our activities delivering the Primary Health Network program on behalf of the Australian Government.

In this edition, you’ll read about the Mid North Specialist Outreach Clinic, which is helping to close critical service gaps by bringing much-needed specialist medical care closer to home. You’ll also see the healing journeys of men at Namatjira Haven, where culture, compassion and connection are at the heart of recovery. And you’ll meet the next generation of health professionals who are gaining valuable experience here on the North Coast, helping to build the primary health care workforce of the future.

At Healthy North Coast, we are proud to support these initiatives and share these stories. They remind us that better health is achieved when we work together - coordinating services, commissioning care that meets local needs, and building capacity for the years ahead.

I hope you enjoy this spring edition and feel as inspired as we do by the people and communities who are making a difference in primary health care every day.”

Monika



Coordination

Specialist Outreach Clinic brings expert care closer to home in thin market area

The Mid North Specialist Outreach Clinic (MNSOC) has provided high-quality, face-to-face medical services to the Coffs Harbour community, since it was established in 2000.

The specialist services offered at the MNSOC are not readily available locally, so the clinic helps to address critical service gaps and reduces the need for patients to travel long distances for care. The specialties include:

Neurology

Orthopaedics

Dermatology

Endocrinology

Psychiatry

The clinic is equipped with treatment and procedure rooms and maintains in-house capabilities for nerve conduction studies, EEG and UVB light therapy.

Healthy North Coast runs the clinic in coordination with the NSW Rural Doctors Network. Specialists are flown in monthly to Coffs Harbour from various locations across Australia and are supported by a high-performing clinic team, including nurses, technicians and medical administration staff who ensure a seamless experience for consumers and visiting specialists.

The clinic remains committed to improving access, reducing waiting times, and enhancing the experience all involved.



6,000+ patients
seen in FY24-25



14% year-on-year
increase in numbers
of patients cared for



“The clinic provides a convenient space for visiting specialists to deliver care that ordinarily is very difficult to access. It means people in our community can access the health services they need without the stress, cost and disruption of travelling long distances. Seeing the difference this makes in people’s lives, on a day-to-day basis, is incredibly rewarding.”

- Christie O’Keeffe, Clinic Coordinator



[Learn more](#)





Commissioning

In Jan-June 2025, the Gulgiwen withdrawal management service delivered:



28 men supported

Participants reported that their quality of life had improved significantly

Every participant surveyed said they would recommend the service to others.



[Learn more about our work in Aboriginal health](#)

Healing journeys at Namatjira Haven

Aboriginal men from across the North Coast are finding strength, healing and renewed purpose through culturally safe alcohol and other drug (AOD) residential rehabilitation provided through the Gulgiwen withdrawal management service at Namatjira Haven based in the Northern Rivers.

Between January and June 2025, Department of Health, Disability and Ageing funding and Healthy North Coast's commissioning meant Namatjira Haven could support 28 men on their recovery journeys, most of them self-referrals seeking a fresh start. The program combines evidence-based approaches with cultural healing, focusing on compassion, strengths, and connection to Country and community.

The impact is also captured in the voices of the men themselves:

“When I first came in, I couldn't walk without help. I felt hopeless and didn't see a way forward. Now, I'm strong enough to walk on my own. I'm healthier than I've been in years and I've got the confidence to live independently.”

“I used to hide away in my room, too anxious to talk. Here, I reconnected with culture and community. I even led cultural dance groups for the other residents. I've got my licence back, I've cleared my debts, and I finally feel proud of who I am.”

For many, the service provides more than just recovery from substance use. It's a place to rebuild identity, strengthen resilience, and create pathways to housing, financial stability, and cultural connection.

As one resident put it:

“The moment I arrived, I felt safe. I knew this was the place I could heal.”

Healthy North Coast is proud to commission the Gulgiwen withdrawal management service with Aboriginal men as part of our commitment to increasing access to culturally safe, person-centred AOD services.



Capacity Building

32,767 square kilometers

541,520 people

1,197 general practitioners

467 nurses in general practice

3,000 primary care nurses and midwives

3,078 allied health professionals



Strengthening the primary care workforce on the North Coast

Healthy North Coast has a strategic goal to build the strength and sustainability of the primary health care workforce. Recent local workforce development initiatives have included:

Welcoming and hosting an RACGP networking dinner for 31 GP Registrars in Coffs Harbour in August.

Introducing more than 400 Charles Sturt University Port Macquarie students to primary health care career opportunities in August.

Hosting a primary health care 'masterclass' that attracted 29 engaged young people at the Luminosity Youth Summit in Port Macquarie in July.

Providing sports medicine education and networking for 250+ local clinicians through our Clinical Societies in five locations in August/September.

Another key highlight was hosting 4 first-year medical students from Charles Sturt University's Orange campus in Port Macquarie in August and September, who were in the region as part of their community placement program. The students spent a full day at our Port Macquarie office, engaging with a variety of teams including Workforce Development, HealthPathways, Health Literacy, Healthy Living and Ageing, and our Regional Managers.

In the afternoon, the students visited two local wound care clinics - Melissa Freeman at the Port Macquarie Wound Clinic and Jodie Duffy at Plunkett's Pharmacy Wound Clinic - where they observed real-world applications of primary care in action.

By supporting education, training, and hands-on experience, Healthy North Coast aims to build the capacity of the local workforce, attract and retain health professionals, and ensure our region is well-placed to meet future health needs.

[Lean more about workforce development](#)